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NEWS

FROM YOUR MUSEUM

THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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DON'T MIND US

It is not unusual for warm arguments to emanate from the circle around the hot stove these winter days. Occasionally the Royal Ontario Museum is called upon to contribute—more to the facts than to the fun. A recent inquiry concerned the age to which birds, mammals and other animals live.

As far as our present information goes, tortoises hold the longevity record among all backboned animals: (100 years and upwards). Crocodilians have the reputation for having a potentially long life but perhaps 70 years would represent a top figure and that would be attained perhaps only under the sheltered conditions of captivity. The longest lived mammal is man, living to over 100 years. The only mammals besides man that are known to attain 50 years of age are the Asiatic elephant (oldest reported, 78 years), and in very, very rare cases, the horse. Few other kinds of mammals exceed thirty years of age.

There are now many dependable records on the length of life of birds, in captivity and in the wild state. Here is an abbreviated report on the Methusalehs of the Canadian bird world: *Birds in captivity*—whooping crane, 38 years; trumpeter swan, 33 years; yellow-headed blackbird, 18 years; raven, 12 years; brown thrasher and rose-breasted grosbeak, 8 years. *Wild birds*—osprey or fish hawk, 21 years; ferruginous rough-legged hawk, 20 years; herring gull and gannet, 17 years; mallard duck and crow, 14 years; common tern, 13 years; cardinal, 12 years; flicker, 11 years; Canada jay, 9 years; crested flycatcher and evening grosbeak, 8 years; chickadee, white-throated sparrow and robin, 7 years; tree sparrow, barn swallow and purple martin, 6 years.

In general the upper limit of age of animals has been very much over-estimated. Stories about pet parrots which are centenarians and "Dobbins" which have been faithful steeds since Confederation will have to be revised, or accompanied by birth certificates. But—don't let us spoil a good argument. As accurate records accumulate, the top figure is going up.

DYES MADE FROM SHELLFISH

Shellfish may not seem very important to present-day man, though they have modern uses. Exhibits in the Royal Ontario Museum show that in other places and at other times these lowly creatures had a greater significance in the life of the people. They served as ornament, money, tool and food. They had still another, more curious, use. In the days of ancient Rome, molluscs were used in the making of dyes. The famous Tyrian purple was extracted from the snail mollusc, known scientifically as *Purpura*. This creature is common in the eastern Mediterranean area. Unfortunately, it was only the wealthy who could purchase garments dyed from this source in those early days, owing to the long and tedious process of obtaining the dye and the small amount furnished by each mollusc.

Shellfish are amongst the earliest of fossilized remains. To present-day geological scholars they are of special use in dating the sequence of rocks.

METAL MIRRORS AN ANCIENT INVENTION

An unbreakable, polished, metal mirror may seem a modern invention, yet mirrors of copper and bronze were used exclusively by ancient peoples before glass mirrors were invented. In the Royal Ontario Museum metal mirrors are displayed among the exhibits pertaining to several ancient peoples—ancient China, Etruria and Egypt. Although their surfaces have been dulled through the centuries, they could still be polished to fulfil their original purpose.

The Egyptian mirrors are the earliest. One in the Museum's collection dates from about 2,400 B.C. Another, of about 2,000 B.C., has its owner's name and titles engraved upon it in hieroglyphic characters. Others, of about 1,400 B.C., have bronze handles in the form of graceful serving-maids. In a nearby gallery is a Roman mirror made of glass. It is backed with silver and set in a wooden frame. The invention of glass mirrors at the beginning of the Christian era quickly caused the virtual disappearance of the attractive but less efficient metal mirrors. However, the metal mirror has come into its own again with men and women of the armed services.

SEEING IS BELIEVING

Most of our learning is derived through the sense of vision. Consider then how important your treasure house, the Royal Ontario Museum, is in the field of education. There one sees actual objects belonging to pre-history or to the present, objects from your home province or from across the seas, even objects from outer space in our universe.

FISH IN HIGH ALTITUDE LAKES EXPLAINED

Anglers are often puzzled as to how fish got into lakes at high altitudes, lakes to which they have no present-day access. Fish are found in a good many lakes above falls which prohibit entrance.

A popular explanation is that live fish eggs were carried to such lakes on the feet of birds. While it is possible that some kinds of fish eggs under very exceptional circumstances may thus have been carried from one lake to another, this unusual happening will not account for the fish in the large numbers of high altitude lakes in which they are found. The real explanation according to scientists in the Royal Ontario Museum is that the waters of our lakes, the Great Lakes, for example, once stood so much higher than at present that their waters engulfed much more territory. Fish were able to swim to outlying basins. There they were left (high but not dry) when the waters receded.

This is the explanation of the occurrence of fish in Lake Nipigon and Lake Nipissing whose outlet streams contain high falls up which fish cannot now ascend. Once the waters of the Great Lakes stood so high that these lakes were mere bays. Similar conditions explain the finding of fish in waters at still higher altitudes.

MUSEUM HOURS

Open Week Days, except Monday, 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.
Sundays, 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.
Tea Room open 3.00 to 5.00 p.m.